

The War On Gender

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There's a troubling trend arising in our [postmodern age](#), an era that has also given rise to 'post-truth'. New information platforms, social upheaval and the overabundance of global communication networks are giving this idea traction and we're seeing it take root and grow, with potentially devastating consequences.

This is the generation that has unequivocally waged war on 'gender'*.

Firstly, What Is Post Truth?

[Post-truth](#) can be summarised in the following way:

"Truth, many will assert, is merely subjective – in reality, there is no such thing as 'truth', or 'the truth', only 'truths'; plural. These are felt differently by individuals and are as real and as true as each other. All emotions, thoughts, feelings or beliefs are correct, inasmuch as the person feels or believes them to be true. Validity and public opinion is based on emotional appeals, not necessarily connected to factual or provable information. In fact, facts themselves are potentially viewed as restrictive, negative, pessimistic, anti-society, or phobic in nature. "Post-truth is the burial of objective facts under an avalanche of emotional and personal belief. Post-truth is not only about winning votes, siding with friends, or dealing with political foes. It has more sinister effects. It is a [gaslighting](#) exercise." | ([The Conversation](#)).

The History Of Post-Truth

“More than 30 years ago, academics started to discredit “truth” as one of the “grand narratives” which clever people could no longer bring themselves to believe in. Instead of “the truth”, which was to be rejected as naïve and/or repressive, a new intellectual orthodoxy permitted only “truths” – always plural, frequently personalised, inevitably relativised.” | [The Conversation](#)

Post-truth discourse includes communication which is simply hot air, often a clever mix of nonsense, humour, and boldly presumptive assertions. It all sounds impressive but is never based on factual objective examination of a subject. The ‘importance of truth’ may be talked about a lot, as part of these conversations, to lend credibility to the statements or claims.

“The proponents of post-truth communication relish things unsaid. Their bluff and bluster is designed not only to attract public attention. It simultaneously hides from public attention things (such as growing inequalities of wealth, the militarisation of democracy and the accelerating death of non-human species) that it doesn’t want others to notice, or that potentially arouse suspicions of the style and substance of post-truth politics. This engendered silence is not just the aftermath or “leftover” of post-truth communication. Every moment of post-truth communication using words backed by signs and text is actively shaped by what is unsaid, or what is not sayable.” | [The Conversation](#)

How Post-Truth And The War On Gender Are Connected

The war on gender seems to fall squarely in the camp of post-truth proponents.

We're seeing more and more, in the media, in public conversation, in our schools and communities, the push for a redefining of what is meant by 'gender' – to the point where facts and provable science relating to human biology are being discounted or ignored.

Gender has traditionally been agreed to be [determined at fertilisation](#) and confirmed (assigned) at birth. Broadly speaking, and in normal fetal development, there will be 23 pairs of chromosomes (46 in total), one of which are a pair of sex chromosomes (either X or Y). One X chromosome is always required. Two of the same sex chromosomes (XX) means the foetus is female. Two different chromosomes (one X and one Y) means the foetus is male.

Despite seeing gender clearly defined all around us as distinct and fixed (male or female), gender is now being described as 'fluid' or even non-existent. Descriptions such as 'non-binary', 'genderqueer', 'transitional' or 'transgender' are common-place. In fact, there are now over 53 recognised and accepted terms used to describe gender now found in our vocabulary.

Men and women are different in many ways. These differences include both biological phenotypes and psychological traits. Some of these differences are influenced by environmental factors. Yet, there are fundamental differences between the sexes that are rooted in biology.

"Of particular interest are sex differences that have been identified in the brain. Although the brains of men and women are highly similar, they show consistent differences that have important implications for each sex. That is, brain sex differences uniquely affect biochemical processes, may contribute to the susceptibility to specific diseases, and may influence specific behaviours. Such biological differences should never be used to justify discrimination or sexism." | [US National Library of Medicine](#)

A [recent conclusion](#) by Professor Robert Plomin of Kings College London, drawn from 45 years of research and hundreds of studies, is that “the single most important factor in each and every one of us – the very essence of our individuality – is our genetic makeup, our DNA.”

Yet ‘gender’, determined at the level of our DNA, is being increasingly thought of as ‘fluid’ or unfixed. ‘Gender’ can also be used to mean ‘gender identity’, now considered to be a spectrum on which you can decide, on any given day, which you ‘feel’ you are.

*“And then I found that gender can have fluidity, which is quite different from ambiguity. If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a **prescribed gender code**, then fluidity is the **refusal to remain one gender or another**. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity **recognises no borders or rules of gender**.” | Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*, 1994 (emphasis is ours)*

The idea that gender isn’t rigid and fixed but rather a choice, based on feelings, is put forward as the higher ideal of utopian society:

“Ideally, we’d live in a world where everyone could exist as whatever gender they are without constantly having to explain or defend themselves. In a world like that, we might not have to put a name to a gender. But that’s not where we’re at right now. Instead, we live in a world where gender defaults to man or woman, and society at large rarely talks about genders that exist outside of that binary.” | Refinery29

Parents are being applauded for raising their children as ‘non-gender’ or ‘gender-neutral’ (*they’ll decide when they’re older*) or withholding announcing the gender of their child at

birth (as if stating a biological truth is a negative). Even asking the most natural of questions ('*did you have a boy or a girl?*') has become potentially fraught with disapproval.

Gender Dysmorphic Disorder And Gender Reassignment Surgery

Reading through the [statistics regarding children and gender issues](#) is alarming, to say the least. In the UK, children as young as four are being referred for gender reassignment surgery, with 50 children a week visiting a GP to discuss gender.

*"Figures suggest a record number of kids now **believe they were born in the wrong body and are being sent for controversial treatment.**" – [The Sun](#)*

Children 11 and older are being prescribed powerful hormones to stunt puberty in preparation for future gender reassignment surgery.

Closer to home, in Australia, an estimated 45,000 school-aged children (1.2%) are thought to identify as transgender. Being transgender or gender diverse is now considered to be "part of the natural spectrum of human diversity."

"Gender may be the most important dimension of human variation, whether that is either desirable, or inevitable. In every society, male and female children are raised differently and acquire different expectations, and aspirations, for their work lives, emotional experiences, and leisure pursuits. These differences may be shaped by how children are raised but gender reassignment, even early in life, is difficult, and problematic. Reassignment in adulthood is even more difficult." | [Psychology Today](#)

In the mid-twentieth century, [John Money, Ph.D.](#) helped

establish the views on the psychology of gender identities and roles. In his academic work, Money argued in favour of the increasingly mainstream idea that gender was a societal construct, malleable from an early age.

[John Money's ill-advised experiment](#) in gender identity however proved ultimately disastrous for identical twins, Bruce (later David) and Brian Reimer. Reading through the [twins' story](#) and the outcome of Money's interventions is difficult and disturbing.

*"After a botched procedure for circumcision at six months resulted in severely damaged genitals, and on the advice of John Money, Bruce Reimer's parents decided to raise Bruce as a girl. Physicians at the Johns Hopkins Hospital removed Reimer's testes and damaged penis, and constructed a vestigial vulvae and a vaginal canal in their place. The physicians also opened a small hole in Reimer's lower abdomen for urination. Following his gender reassignment surgery, Reimer was given the first name Brenda, and his parents raised him as a girl. He received estrogen during adolescence to promote the development of breasts. Throughout his childhood, Reimer was not informed about his male biology. When he was fourteen, Reimer began the process of reassignment to being a male. In adulthood, Reimer reported that he suffered psychological trauma due to Money's experiments, which Money had used to justify sexual reassignment surgery for children with intersex** or damaged genitals since the 1970s. As an adult, he married a woman but depression, and drug abuse ensued, culminating in suicide at the age of thirty-eight." | [The Embryo Encyclopedia Project](#)*

Money's ideas about gender identity were forcefully challenged by Paul McHugh, a leading psychiatrist at the same institution as Money. The bulk of this challenge came from an analysis of gender reassignment cases in terms of both motivation and outcomes.

McHugh denied that reassignment surgery was ever either medically necessary, or ethically defensible. To bolster his case, McHugh looked at the clinical outcomes for gender reassignment surgeries. He concluded:

“Although transsexuals did not regret their surgery, there were little or no psychological benefits: They had much the same problems with relationships, work, and emotions, as before. The hope that they would emerge now from their emotional difficulties to flourish psychologically had not been fulfilled.” | [Paul McHugh, Ph.D](#)

There is no doubt that there is a marked increase in children, young adults and adults who are distressed with their assigned gender. Gender dysphoria is a real and observable phenomenon. Yet surely gender reassignment is not the solution, but simply a band-aid approach to a deeper, far greater and more serious issue.

Intelligent Design: Let's Talk About God

“He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind” when they were created.” | Genesis 5:2 (NIV)

The Bible, once considered a verifiable source and its author, the intelligent designer of all creation, states that humanity's genders were clearly defined from the beginning – as male and female. Bible language, throughout all 66 books, confirms this by using specific pronouns such as 'he' and 'she' – gender-specific and certainly not ambiguous. Jesus himself believed and confirmed the Genesis record in Matthew 19:4 (also Mark 10:6), saying “Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female.'”

The differences between the genders are unique and distinctive, both designed by God with purpose in mind (Titus

2:1-5, 1 Peter 3:7) (1 Timothy 3:1 – 4:16). Both genders are intrinsically valuable and precious to God, and we see His characteristics displayed by the perfect merging of both the masculine and feminine traits. These distinct genders are the fundamental building blocks of God's creation and are part of God's plan for His family. His definition of marriage (Genesis 2:24) and the procreation of the species (Genesis 1:28) is the natural outcome of the union of male and female and clearly supports the biological truth embedded in our DNA.

The diversity found in humanity is to be celebrated at the same time as the definitive nature of our gender is to be applauded.

Furthermore, [the church](#) (the 'body of Christ') is described in poetic language as a bride (female), with Christ as the groom (male) (Ephesians 5:22-33); the symbolic language echoing the reality of human biology.

"While technically God's design for man and woman may not be a [salvation truth](#), practically it is indispensable for every person to know and experience in order to live their lives as [followers of Christ](#) in this world, as beings created by God as male or female by design and for a purpose." – [Crossways](#)

Yet, the rejection of a Creator, of intelligent and purposeful design or a greater purpose at work, leads to the inevitable outcomes that we are seeing take root in today's society. We are being encouraged to believe that there is no truth, only *truths* (each individual's truth as true as any other), and subjective at that. Definitions and boundaries are deemed to be outdated and irrelevant.

And it seems gender won't be the only casualty to result from the post-truth era – reason and the pursuit of knowledge and understanding are being lost in the clamour of opinion and emotional verification and in their place we find an epidemic of [narcissism, arrogance and cynicism](#).

“Come now, and let us reason together”, God says in Isaiah. Although His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9), He encourages humans in the pursuit of knowledge, He takes pleasure in the reasoning of the human mind and the desire of mankind to understand the intricacies He has created.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” | Proverbs 25:2

Paul McHugh, Ph.D Has The Final Word

*“In a [recent] interview from his home in Baltimore, where he still sees patients, McHugh explained that the “duty of all doctors who propose a treatment is to know the nature of the problem they propose to treat. The issue of transgender [people] is, the vast majority coming for surgery now don’t have a biological reason but a psychosocial reason.” While McHugh successfully lobbied for more than 30 years to keep gender-reassignment surgery from becoming a Medicare benefit, he supports the operation for those born with an intersex** condition, which means having a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t fall into the typical definition of male or female. People with abnormalities of development should be helped to find their place as they see it best,” McHugh said. “But they are a tiny number of the transgender population seeking and being given treatment.” | [The Washington Post](#)*

I recognise that this is a controversial topic and one that is being fiercely debated, all around the world and from both points of view. I also acknowledge that my opinions and thoughts on the matter are obviously based on a certain worldview and my belief in an intelligent designer (God), and that you, the reader, may not share these views. This article

is not intended to be offensive or divisive in nature, but rather to open a channel of respectful conversation about a subject that is deeply important to many people. I do not encourage discrimination, hate-speech or sexism towards anyone, at any time, but, particularly in this instance, towards anyone who does not share this point of view.

*Historically, 'gender' and 'sex' are words used to describe and define the anatomical and physiological differences between men and women. Modern terminology uses 'sex' to refer to biological characteristics and 'gender' to refer to the individual's and society's perceptions of sexuality and the concepts of masculinity and femininity. This article is using 'gender' and 'sex', as defined in the historical sense.

**This article also purposely does not address or discuss the issues surrounding chromosomal abnormalities or intersex conditions.

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Radical Social Change: A Letter To Philemon

"Injustice: unfairness, unjust act, Unfair: not equitable or honest, not impartial or according to rules, society: organised and interdependent community, system and organisation of this" – The Australian Oxford Dictionary, Third Edition

The issue of social injustice* has always been one that is close to my heart. It's something that I like to talk to my kids about often, to try to impress upon them just how fortunate they are in many aspects of their life. They live in

a modern, western country and are possessors of freedoms and rights still not available to many other peoples of the world. My daughters, particularly, have liberties still not accessible to many other [girls and women](#). And on the delicate subject of race, my children haven't had to endure the criticism or racial bigotry experienced by those who clearly display the truth of their indigenous ancestry by the colour of their skin (and who have been and are still being treated unjustly because of it).

Historically, social injustice has often been tolerated or, even worse, promoted on the basis of prejudice and [erroneously applied religious doctrine](#). Religious intolerance has fuelled many of this world's wars and God has been made the "scapegoat" for much of what is the worst of humanity.

One only needs to look, for example, at the [founding document](#) of the devoutly Christian American nation, the Declaration of Independence, to see that what people say and what people *do* are often two quite different things.

The statement in the second paragraph, **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness"** did not prelude American citizens from denying those same rights to thousands of men and women during the infamous period of slavery, based simply on the colour of their skin.

Mistreatment of slaves was further bolstered by their ignorant and prejudicial application of Bible passages. It took nearly 250 years for the official practice of human trafficking and slavery to be abolished in America and yet the affects of slavery are still felt and are at work today in many parts of America, and indeed the world.

Social injustice, however, is not just an American problem, or

a historical problem. It's a world problem, manifested in many different ways, and is still a very relevant conversation for modern times.

“Over and over again, in the history of the world, man has made life into chaos.” – Oswald Chambers

What Does God Have To Say About Social Injustice?

God, the creator of all, made all equal. The only difference commented on in Genesis, at the creation of humanity, was our genders – both uniquely special and individually reflective of God's glory. We're told throughout the Bible that God makes no distinction between people based on their social status (Jeremiah 22:3), their ethnicity (Acts 10: 34-35), or their gender (Galatians 3:28).

In fact, we're told that God is just, fair, and completely impartial (Deuteronomy 10:17, Romans 2:11). He despises mistreatment, discrimination or prejudicial treatment:

“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.” | Isaiah 1:17 (ESV)

“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other’” | Zechariah 7:9-10 (NIV)

“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” | John 7:24 (NIV)

This impartiality is thrown into sharp relief against the

story found in the letter to Philemon.

Philemon, squeezed between the epistle to Titus and the letter to the Hebrews, is often overlooked and under-read. But it is a truly astonishing and socially radical exposition of exactly how God views all men and women. It tackles the serious and often difficult shift in thinking that is required and shows that belief in and love of God must affect our relationships with others in positive ways and with complete impartiality.

Sometimes, these effects are profound and far-reaching, as in the case of Philemon.

Who Was Philemon?

Philemon was a wealthy, Christian slave owner, living in Colosse, a city which is now in modern Turkey. The area of Asia Minor was a huge melting pot of ethnicities and also one of the [first areas to flourish with converts to the new religion of Christianity](#). Overlaying this was the fact that this area was part of the hugely expansive [Roman Empire](#), at the height of its glory and, as such, was subject to Roman law and Roman customs.

In many cities in the Roman Empire, up to [30% of the population were slaves](#). They undertook the bulk of the work required to keep the empire running and were considered to be the legal property of their owners. There were some rules against cruelty, but we would recognise them as the equivalent of 'animal rights', certainly not as human rights. Owners, like Philemon, essentially had the right to treat slaves however they wanted.

Who Was Onesimus?

Typically, a slave would take on the religion of his or her master and Onesimus, the subject of the letter to Philemon, was one such slave. Having converted to Christianity, he then,

at some point, fled his master's household and travelled hundreds of miles to where Paul was, the heart of the empire itself, to Rome. Rome differed from Greek city-states in that freed slaves were allowed to become citizens and perhaps this was Onesimus' objective in seeking out Rome.

The testimony of a slave could not be accepted in a Roman Court and they had no rights at all under the law. A master could punish a slave, however he wanted, and punishments included branding, scourging, torture or death. The punishment for a runaway slave was often branding in the forehead and the deliberate breaking of bones or joints.

This was Onesimus' expected fate, under Roman law, and Philemon had every right, as a master and Roman citizen, to enforce such punishment.

Jesus Changes Our Culture

Paul's letter, however, is full of warm entreaty on behalf of Onesimus. He reminds Philemon that God's rule of love transcends any man-made law and that, in Jesus, both slave and master are equal. They are considered brothers, both children of a Heavenly Father. Paul was sending Onesimus back to Philemon, not as just a slave, but as family.

Paul tells Philemon to add any debt owed by Onesimus to his own account but, in fact, considers it a favour to be done for Jesus. Paul is more than confident of Philemon's response and gives much emphasis to "this faith we hold in common...and that people recognise Christ in all of it".

The remarkable transformative power of the Gospel spills from the words in this letter – showing the dramatic ripple effect a response to God has in our personal lives. It challenges everything we do, our belief systems and possibly even misplaced prejudices about others. It compels us to behave justly to others, with impartiality, even though the world

around us might not be just or impartial. **It compels us to do better and be better, simply because Jesus is.**

The Gospel of Good News often causes radical upheaval in our own lives as it forces our practices and beliefs to fall into line with the ideals of a true, loving, and socially just God.

“He’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It’s quite simple. Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don’t take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.” | Micah 6:8 (The Message)

***In this article, “social injustice” is used in conjunction with the dictionary definitions noted at the beginning. Social injustice can be considered to fall into two categories, which are often inter-connected. These categories are defined as ‘Inter-Social Treatment’ and ‘Unequal Government Regulation’. “Inter-Social Treatment involves unequal treatment of a group(s) of people within the local and regional scale. The basis for this unequal treatment is usually due to a personal belief about that group(s): Unequal Government Regulations are laws and regulations that purposefully or otherwise, discriminate a group(s) from the same opportunities and resources, based on differences that are unique to that group(s)”**

(cited: <https://www.pachamama.org/social-justice/social-justice-issues>) Examples may include: unfair labour practices, racial, gender, age or ethnicity discrimination, inequality of health care or education based on certain criteria and to the worst degree, systematic genocide based on certain criteria.

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David's Story: God Sees The Heart Of Us

[David](#), the shepherd boy-turned-king and famous author of the Psalms, is perhaps one of the most complex characters in the Bible. At times, he displays examples of great faith, leadership and spirituality. Yet, these admirable qualities are often starkly contrasted against the deplorable choices and wicked actions for which he was responsible.

How can God have cause to say of him *"I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who will do all my will."* (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22)? How could God say this about a man whose actions at times seemed deeply in contrast to the will and character of God himself?

Examining the **why** of this statement tells us so much about how God really sees us and, in turn, how we should see ourselves.

God See Beyond The Valleys

In the vast landscape that is our life, there are moments of grandeur, like lofty mountain peaks. And yet there are valleys too, times when we find ourselves in low and desperate places. These are the times when we find ourselves making poor choices or bad decisions or, like David, being responsible for actions that are completely wrong and offensive to God.

Among the list of David's failures is found adultery (2 Samuel 11:4) and murder (2 Samuel 11:15). He was less than an exemplary example as a father (2 Samuel 13:15-22), and at times, as a king. It could be difficult to see what God saw or loved about this man, when collating the different snapshots of his life.

It seems contradictory that the very thing that God commended David for – his heart – is the very place in which these evil

choices find their root.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts: murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.” – Matthew 15:19, NLT

Yet God sees beyond the valleys. He deciphers the intentions of our heart and looks past the lapses in our spirituality or even those sins we find most heinous. In a certain sense, our mistakes matter less than our motivations. He is more interested in who we can become than in who we are now and this is exactly what He saw in David, the potential and the will to **do** better and to **be** better.

This is why He was able to look into David’s heart and see something of Himself there.

That David was considerably flawed is unquestionable. His love for God, however, is not. His ability to be deeply touched by truth and show genuine remorse for his wrongdoings is what God loved about him. That he **wanted** to do right, even though he often didn’t, is what God took notice of. He displayed a truly penitent response when confronted with the reality of his decisions and his many psalms are evidence of his beautiful, contrite spirit.

Despite Our Flaws, God Still Loves Us

The Bible doesn’t seek to gloss over David’s mistakes. He could have been easily painted in quite a different light; recorded for history as a glowing example of virtue and goodness. Yet he wasn’t and that, in itself, is telling.

God wants us to learn something very important from David’s life, his choices and his mistakes. God wants us to learn that despite all our flaws and weaknesses or even despite the worst things we may have done, God is able to see into our hearts and love us for who we really are.

We see God's love displayed in the most ultimate way by the provision of His son as the saviour of mankind. God didn't send His son to die for a world of righteous men and women. In actuality, God knew how deeply flawed the human race was, yet still He sent [Jesus](#) to die for humanity. He knew what we **could** become and what He hoped we **would** become, and that was enough.

"For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. It is rare indeed for anyone to die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." – Romans 5:5-7, NIV

Does this mean that we can do what we like, because God loves us anyway? Not at all. Paul the Apostle answers this question in Romans 6:1-2 where he says *"Of course not! How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it?"*

Just because God will forgive us, doesn't mean we should provide Him endless opportunity! Just because God's gift of grace has been given, doesn't mean we should abuse it.

Choices And Consequences

Did David "get away with" the terrible things he did, just because God loved him? Absolutely not. God's universal law of choice and consequence, established in Eden, still played out in David's life.

David suffered great loss, political instability, serious dysfunction within his family and heartbreaking betrayal by his peers, as a direct result of his actions. God didn't shield him from these or remove them from his life, even though He certainly had the power to do so.

Just like David, we are [responsible for the consequences of our choices](#) and must learn to live with them. Yet, we can be

confident that God can see to the heart of us too. That He is still working in our lives, despite our failures, to [bring us to Him](#). And that He alone assesses our motives.

“All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.” Proverbs 16:2, NKJV

How Should We See Ourselves?

It's very easy to judge ourselves from the valley floor. We may be living with deep regrets about choices and decisions we've made in the past. We may feel judged by others and feel that no-one really knows us or understands our motives. We may even doubt God's love for us and His ability to forgive us.

The deeply personal message of the Bible is that God **does** love us. He doesn't judge us on our moments of failure or weakness – He knows and understands that we're human. He surveys the landscape of our life, both the highs and lows and is able to weigh that all in the balance, seeing to the heart of who we really are.

“Then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know every human heart)” – 1 Kings 8:39, NIV

God doesn't want us to remain in the valleys. He is ready and willing to help us climb out of them. We have a remarkable gift of grace and forgiveness offered to us, through Jesus, and it is God's power in our lives that can bring us up from the valley floor and on to the mountain heights. Like David, our hearts will sing the song of ascent:

“I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1-2

Paul the Apostle likens the gift of grace to treasure in jars of clay. This treasure is God's glorious light that has shone in our hearts, illuminating what lies within and giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's grace that teaches our hearts to trust God and relieves our fears. And it's grace that will lead us home. Amazing Grace – how sweet the sound! How precious it is!

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” 1
Corinthians 4:7

This article was first published 28 May 2018

The Night Before Tomorrow | Communion

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Jesus looked around the table at the closest of his disciples gathered with him, their faces reflected in the warmth of the candlelight. It was early spring, and the nights were still cool; the disciple whom he loved leaned in a little closer, although as much for affection as for warmth.

The room was filled with the pungent aroma of bitter herbs, the freshly baked scent of *Matzah*, the rich meaty smell of roasted lamb, and the earthy sweetness of the wine.

They were a diverse and sometimes dissonant group, these disciples that His Father had given him. Some were initially

strangers to each other, and others, as natural-born brothers, knew each other like the back of their hands. They all came to him from very different social backgrounds and held diametrically opposed philosophical and political viewpoints. Rivalries often broke out between them, and yet, in this largely dissimilar group, they had found unity in him, and in them, Jesus could see the seeds of the church – his church – that was soon to be born. These few represented the expansive and diverse family that God would build through him, for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

But the next few days would be very hard on these little sheep of his and they were to be tested like never before.

Jesus had celebrated Passover with his family for as long as he could remember; with his mother, Mary, his adoptive father, Joseph, and his brothers and sisters. Often, other families in their neighbourhood had piled into the single, large, comfortable room of their simple stone-and-mortar home to join them. He remembers the time that it had been his turn, as the youngest at the table, to ask the *Mah Nishtanah* – the four questions, each one beginning with “*How is this night different from all other nights?*”

On all other nights, we eat chameitz and matzah. Why on this night, only matzah?

On all other nights, we eat all vegetables. Why, on this night, maror?

On all other nights, we don't dip even once. Why on this night do we dip twice?

On all other nights, we eat either sitting upright or reclining. Why on this night do we all recline?

Everything on the table had represented something. Everything eaten with the humble dinnerware had told a story. The asking had then prompted a dramatic retelling of Israel's liberation

from slavery in Egypt many hundreds of years before; a night that was forever etched in Jewish memory, a night of blood and fire, death and deliverance. The account of their exodus and deliverance had been retold ever since, in song and story, and especially now on this night of the year; so that they might never forget who they were, to whom they belonged, and to whom they owed their freedom.

Gathering now with his disciples to celebrate Passover once again, Jesus understood, as no one else did, the true significance of what was symbolised by this festival and what kind of deliverance God had always had in mind. Turning to his disciples, his voice warm with feeling, Jesus said "*I have earnestly desired to eat this with you before I suffer.*"

It was the night before tomorrow and this was to be his last Passover.

The Story Of Redemption

Passover was a festive meal, celebrating Jewish freedom from bondage but it was also a powerful metaphor for a greater story of deliverance that God would one day enact on behalf of the world. It told the important and significant story about Jesus, long before his arrival, and the work that he would come to do on behalf of humanity – the story of redemption.

Jesus now takes this commemorative Passover meal, already 1,500 years old by this time and full of ancient symbology and meaning, and repurposes it in order to institute his 'new covenant'. This new covenant would supersede the old and would be a covenant for everyone, not just Jews. In Jesus, all the families of the earth would be blessed and this covenant's promise would be sure, sealed by the body and blood of Jesus himself.

Known by many different names today ('*the breaking of bread*', '*the table of the Lord*', '*communion*', '*the eucharist*', or '*the*

Lord's supper'), this 'new covenant' meal is a sacred reminder of a significant historical event; deliverance and new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Participating together in communion, Christians recount to one another their own stories of deliverance, asking, as it were, "*How is this night different from all other nights?*" They eat bread and drink wine together, blessing the name of the Lord and celebrating life and resurrection. There are few things more important or significant for Christians to share together.

Bread, the staple of life, is broken and shared, as Jesus once did for his disciples. In this bread is symbolised urgency, imminent death, and sacrifice; but also unity, commonality, and community.

Wine is poured and passed around; representing new life, joy, blessing, sanctification, and grace, flowing from Jesus' own life to ours.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, we recount, one to another, what the Lord has done for us in his death and the new life that is promised to us in his resurrection. We do this, as often as we do this, in remembrance and celebration of him.

*"I take the bread of life
Broken for all my sin
Your body crucified
To make me whole again
I will recall the cup
Poured out in sacrifice
To trade this sinner's end
For Your new covenant
Hallelujah
I'll live my life in remembrance
Hallelujah*

Your promise I won't forget"

Remembrance | Hillsong Worship

The First Communion

Many Christians no longer regularly celebrate communion. For many churches, communion has become highly ritualised and ceremonial. For some churches, communion has become exclusive, offered only to their own members.

Yet communion is an important part of our Christian life, as members of Jesus' body and God's family. It is a key element in our fellowship with one another. It is Jesus' covenant with ***each one of us*** and the price of it was his own blood.

The first communion is, at its core, a deliverance story in which all Christians share. It's a tale of liberation from darkness and the life that is found in Jesus. It's a reminder and a witness that, in Jesus, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose. Sharing the meal of communion powerfully connects each member of Jesus' church to one another as they acknowledge their commonality in him, who is the life force that unites the church and whose love birthed it into being.

The first communion speaks clearly to us of sacrifice, freedom, belonging, and resurrection. It smells like bitter herbs and warm bread and sounds like singing and the familiar clatter of dinnerware. It takes place in homes, green spaces, sidewalk cafes and church buildings, hospitals and office spaces, on beaches, and in parks.

Its most defining feature is Jesus and the remembrance of him by those who are his.

It brings real people, diverse and divided in life, into common union together, into relationship, into the sweaty,

messy, untidy reality that is the church, *not because they are worthy, but because Jesus died for them and [that is enough](#)*.

It's significant that Jesus connects the institution of communion – which speaks of his sacrifice and death, motivated by love – with the importance of his followers showing his love by loving one another. At the end of their meal, he gives them a 'new commandment', to live by once he is gone:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

By loving one another as he has loved them, all the world will know that they are his disciples. *The world will see your love for each other and know, without even having to ask, that you are followers of the king.*

How we love, as Christians, therefore, is either a powerful witness to the truth and reality of the risen king and our allegiance to him; or a public denial of our belief in the king and his ability to truly transform our hearts. By not loving as the king loves, we demonstrate for all to see that the *ruler of this world* still controls us; that we are allowing this rule to flourish in our lives and govern our actions towards others.

Real faith in the king is more than the words we say, the emotions we feel, ideas we debate, or a truth we believe. Real faith is something we do; expressed in visible ways, deeply rooted in and flowing from this focused centre; that “one man died for everyone.”

Celebrating communion is neither an optional nor exclusive event, for some Christians only, but an essential and embracing reality for all Christians; regularly bringing all of God's family together in celebration.

It's a powerful reminder of who we are, to whom we belong, and to whom we owe our freedom.

Walking With God

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

"He has told you, O human, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." | Micah 6:8 NAS 1977

Knowing And Being Known

At the heart of us all is a deep desire to be known; to be so intimately connected with another person that it's as if we are no longer two people but one – *'a single soul dwelling in two bodies.'* There are many of us who are lucky enough to experience that kind of affinity with another person; sharing empathy, support and kinship in a close human relationship like no other. Our experience of marriage, that of committing to another person and them to us, is one of the most intimate and fulfilling relationships we will have in this life.

Yet nothing will compare to knowing and being known by the One who has breathed life into us, animating our flesh and bone and *'in whom we have our very being.'*

God intended that humanity would seek Him, reach out for him and desire to be close to Him in relationship. He is not far from each one of us, as near as the tongue in our mouth, as close as the heart in our chest. (Acts 17:28, Romans 10:8)

In moments of quiet worship, in stirring songs of devotion, in times of disappointment, heartache and despair, the emotions that overwhelm our hearts all serve to propel us towards seeking and loving the One who rings our hearts like a bell. (Abraham Heschel)

Our days are numbered, yet we were made to walk with God. Perhaps we all feel that pull and longing, in the secret places of our hearts, to return to the place in the beginning, to the cool shade of the garden, where God once walked with us.

A Perfect Eden

In that garden, in the beginning, Adam and Eve were in close relationship with their Creator. The world that existed at that time was 'very good', a perfect Eden where God's glory shone softly between the tall, slim trees and Heaven and Earth were as one. In the middle of the garden, grew two trees; the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. From one tree Adam and Eve could freely eat, but the other was forbidden to them, prohibited from being eaten and not even to be touched. Life, and life abundantly, flowed from one and certain death would be the result of eating from the other.

It was such a small thing, only one bite, and yet the result of their disobedience was catastrophic. The evil of sin entered God's good world, and would eventually spread like a dark, cancerous mass across the surface of the earth.

A [sentence of death](#) was passed, not just to Adam and Eve, but to all who would come after them. The way to the garden – to the place where God had once walked with them – was barred. The oneness with God that had existed before sin entered the world had been broken and a great chasm now lay between the Creator and His children.

A Communion Of The Heart

This expression, *“walking with God”* is used often in the Bible and means, *‘not merely God’s knowledge of a person, but also a person’s response to God. Practical obedience, along with a communion of heart and will, are described as “walking with” or “before God.”* (Genesis 5:22; Genesis 6:9; Genesis 17:1; Psalm 56:13; Psalm 116:9)’ (Elliot’s Commentary)

The first person that we’re told *‘walked with God’* after the catastrophe that unfolded in the garden was a man named Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24). Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, a famous chapter cataloguing many faithful individuals, tells us that Enoch was taken from this life and didn’t experience death. The commendation of him was of *“one who pleased God”* (Hebrews 11:5). The word used for walk in the commentary on Enoch’s life in Genesis means, in Hebrew *‘to come, go, walk’*. It carries the idea of coming and going *with God* – that is, that Enoch was in complete union with God and agreement about where they were going together. He walked alongside God on a daily basis, going here and there in life but always at God’s side.

This idea of *‘being at God’s side or being near to God’* being related to faith is recognised by Paul the Apostle in his thoughts about Enoch (Hebrews 11:6). He verbalises what is surely a connection between the two ideas: *“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:5-6, ESV). Walking with God, Paul seems to be making clear, is synonymous with a *‘faith that pleases God’*.

“Can two walk together without agreeing where to go?” | Amos 3:3, BSB

“Will, then, God walk with a person, guiding, shielding, strengthening him, if that person is not in harmony with Him?”

He (Amos) illustrates the truths that all effects have causes, and that from the cause you can infer the effect. The “two” (here) are God’s judgment and the prophet’s word. These do not coincide by mere chance, no more than two persons pursue in company the same end without previous agreement. The prophet announces God’s judgment because God has commissioned him; the prophet is of one mind with God, therefore the Lord is with him, and confirms his words.” (Elliot’s Commentary)

An Invitation To Deeper Relationship

Abraham, called the friend of God (James 2:23), was summoned deeper into relationship by the invitation of God to ‘walk with Him’

“I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.” | Genesis 17:1, NIV

Abraham is known not only as the *friend of God* but also as the *father of faith*, demonstrating the reality that ‘walking with God’ and the action of faith in our Christian lives is one and the same thing.

Faith is what brings us to that place of being ‘put right with God’ but it’s [faith, meshed with action](#), that really brings us into a full relationship with Him. The all-encompassing meaning of belief is intrinsically linked with the actions that back it up – seamless believing and doing. It’s not the doing that makes us right, but it’s impossible to show our faith, without the doing.

The apostle James, in his letter to the believers, tells them that separating belief from action is like separating a body from the life force or spirit within – all that’s left is a corpse. (James 2:18-26). As Eugene Peterson so aptly puts it, *“Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that; it is skill in living. For, what good is a truth if we don’t know how to live it? What good is an*

intention if we can't sustain it?"

It's faith, coupled with action – *believing and doing* – that elevated Abraham from being not just a *father of faith* but also the *friend of God* – participant in a close and intimate relationship of knowing and being known.

The Psalmist also spoke of the comfort of knowing and being known – that God's presence was always at his side.

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." | Psalm 23:4, NIV

'Walking with God' means simply that we are [God's people](#). We are intimately known by Him and He is known by us. This is a relationship where God's presence is truly living with us and we are walking alongside Him, each and every day of our lives.

A Promise Of Reconciliation

This has always been the comforting promise from God to His people (Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 10:12, 1 John 1:7), firstly to the nation of Israel and then flowing and expanding outward from Israel to include all of humanity in the [new covenant](#):

"I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people." | Leviticus 26:12, NLT

"I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people." | Ezekiel 37:27, NLT

"For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." | 2 Corinthians 6:16, ESV

Jesus was the exact representation of God and the very imprint of His nature (Hebrews 1:3, John 14:10-11), the Word-made-flesh who took up residence amongst us (John 1:1-14).

By knowing him, we could truly know God and the promise of reconciliation could be seen clearly for the first time; so close we could reach out and touch it. The morning of that resurrection, it was as if all the world waited, in breathless anticipation, for the moment when restored relationship became a reality and we could once again walk with God.

Through the blood of Jesus, the painful separation between us and the One who loves us best, has been healed. The ravine of sin has been bridged and we who were once far off from God, are brought close again, in perfect, harmonious relationship.

A Life Alongside God

Walking with God is sometimes equated to simply '*living a moral life*', but I believe this misses the point.

Firstly, there's nothing simple about living a perfect, moral life. And while the Christian life is certainly about *trying* to do the right thing, we will actually never achieve a morally acceptable life. Only Jesus achieved that and it's only through his victory that we are conquerors, but certainly not through our own efforts. *Walking with God* isn't about achieving perfection, not at the core of it all.

Walking with God is about a life spent *alongside God* and, as a result of that choice, producing the kind of faith that is real and pleasing to God. It's about relationship; a decision of the heart to choose the way that God is walking, not our own, and to pursue that path with Him.

This is a faith that isn't just a thought or a hope or a list of unemotive 'do's' or 'don'ts' but forward motion in real communion with God, as a Father and as a Friend. "Walking with God" is deeply connected to the idea of having *living faith* –

that is, faith expressed through action, not merely subscribing to a set of beliefs. It's living in the delicately balanced tension between faith and works and ensuring that the things we're convicted of find real demonstration in our conduct.

Corinthians confirms that walking with God is by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7) but this is faith demonstrated not just in *saying* what we believe but *doing* what we say we believe.

It isn't an intellectual exercise – *knowing things about God* – but a choice of the heart, intimately *knowing God*, His character, His will, His greatness and majesty, and then choosing humbly to walk alongside Him every moment of our lives. We'll get it wrong more often than we'll get it right, but we have faith that 'the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin' and we have confidence that his sacrifice enables us to draw close to God and choose relationship again with Him. This is where conviction and conduct meet in glorious union and we are truly 'walking with God'.

"We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true." | Dallas Willard (1935 – 2013)

"It's possible for a man to spend so much mental energy in discussing and rediscussing the simple element of truth that he never puts what has learned into practical effect, and this is probably why some people have drawn a fictitious distinction between matters of morality and what have been called 'mere questions of doctrine'. Sound doctrine is the foundation of sound morality and right action is simply right doctrine in practice. By putting on the whole armour of God, we must have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Our shoes are in use every step of the way. We are not always using the sword of the Spirit to the throwing down

of fleshly strongholds; but we are always walking, whether in war or peace, whether surrounded by the wicked and assailed by fiery darts, or in the assembly of the saints and hearing words of cheer. Our 'walk in life' covers all this experience." | Islip Collyer, Conviction and Conduct (page 97, 106)

On Earth As In Heaven

Awareness of and responding to the love of God is at the heart of our Christian lives. We are who we are, first and foremost, because of God revealed in Christ. Because of Jesus, sin has been defeated and death no longer has the final word. "There's nothing more to separate us from the promise, the words of a living hope." (This, My Soul | The Gray Havens)

The truth is that *'walking with God'*, that beautiful, expansive, all-enveloping phrase, is what draws us back into the light, where we can stand naked and unashamed in the glow of God's glory. Choosing to walk with God, in a repaired relationship through Jesus, returns us to that garden, to the place where everything was *'very good'* and where every heartbeat of our life echos to the will and glory of our Creator.

"How great the chasm that lay between us, how high the mountain I could not climb. In desperation, I turned to heaven and spoke Your name into the night. Then through the darkness, Your loving-kindness tore through the shadows of my soul. The work is finished, the end is written, Jesus Christ, my living hope." | Jesus Christ, My Living Hope, Bethel Music

Two worship songs, in particular, were the inspiration behind

this article. The first, 'Your Glory' by All Sons & Daughters, is a beautiful reminder of the purpose for which we were created and to which we're all called. The second, 'This My Soul' by The Gray Havens is a compelling retelling of the story in the beginning: the perfect peace of Eden, disrupted by sin, but promised rescue, redemption, and restoration, at great personal cost, by the Creator Himself.

Shod With The Gospel Of Peace

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will inherit the earth." | Matthew 5:9 (ESV)

The Spiritual Warrior

In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul gives a striking description of a person known as the spiritual warrior, a follower of Jesus who has been powerfully equipped for warfare by the armour of God Himself. The elements or pieces of armour which make up 'the whole armour' are of God – it is His strength which believers are armed with and protected by (Ephesians 6:10-17, cp Isaiah 59:17). Paul confirms in Ephesians that we are to view the battle that we are all fighting, as believers, as a spiritual one, and that what we do in this warfare has eternal significance.

There are six pieces of armour that make up this warrior's protective battle gear:

- The Belt of Truth
- The Breastplate of Righteousness
- Shoes of the Gospel of Peace
- Shield of Faith
- Helmet of Salvation

– Sword of the Spirit.

In this article, I'd like to focus on the third item, the shoes of the 'gospel of peace'. To be 'shod with peace' may initially seem like a strange inclusion in the armour of someone who is prepared for battle. What would peace and warfare have to do with each other? Surely these two terms are mutually exclusive? But first, I want to start by sharing a couple of passages from Paul's letter to the church at Rome:

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Carefully consider what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible on your part, **live at peace** with everyone.” | Romans 12:17-18 (ESV)*

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us **pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.**” | Romans 14:17-19 (ESV)*

Living And Working For Peace

In his letters, Paul encourages the believers in Rome to ‘*live at peace with everyone, if it is possible on your part*’ (Romans 12:8). He encourages them to “*pursue what leads to peace*” (Romans 14:9) and confirms that the “*kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace*”.

Jesus gave his famous discourse on the mount during his earthly ministry, also known as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), where he too affirmed that those that ‘*work for peace*’ will be the children of God (Matthew 5:9). As members of [his one body](#), it's his peace that is to rule our hearts (Colossians 3:15).

And God, as we know, is in the peacemaking business.

So it seems contradictory that Jesus, given the title of ‘Prince of Peace’ long before his birth (Isaiah 9:6), should

say these words:

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. “ ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” | Jesus, Matthew 10: 34 (NIV)

Luke’s gospel repeats the refrain:

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.” | Jesus, Luke 12:51 (ESV)

Initially, the commission to be peacemakers, to live at peace with everyone, together with Paul’s statement that the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace, seems to be at odds with Jesus’ own words and even with Paul’s later language of *warfare* found in Ephesians. So I think it’s helpful to consider the definition of what ‘peace’ is before we can understand how we are to ‘work for peace’ or be ‘peacemakers’.

Peacekeeping Is Not Peacemaking

We can often speak about ‘keeping the peace’ and believe that this is the same as peacemaking. Yet peace – true peace – is defined as ‘*a state or period in which there is no war or a war has ended.*’

Choosing not to act in violent ways towards another party whom one may be ‘at war with’ **doesn’t equate to peace**. Just because we don’t acknowledge the reality of hostilities doesn’t mean they don’t exist. For example, distrust, hostility and enmity still continued during the Cold War, even though a shot was never fired. Tension was still felt and expressed by both parties and mutual distrust and enmity were still very real.

And it was still known as a “war”, despite there not being any actual physical warfare. Some might like to think that ‘peace’ was achieved, or at least a more acceptable sense of peace than physical war, but this was simply pseudo-peace, a type of peacekeeping but certainly not peacemaking.

God didn’t settle for peacekeeping! In sending Jesus, He entered directly into the hostilities between Himself and humanity and brought about the cessation of war. True peace only comes when true reconciliation is achieved – that is, the ending of hostilities and the restoration of relationship.

This is why the gospel is styled **the gospel of peace** – not because it makes Christians nice, agreeable or compliant people. The gospel of peace doesn’t make us nice – it [makes us new](#)! It restores our relationship with God and gives us a new identity as children of God. We are no longer enemies but friends with our Creator. This truth, this [realignment of identity](#), this cessation of hostilities, becomes one of the first weapons in the arsenal of our spiritual battle.

*“But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For **he is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, **thereby bringing the hostility to an end**. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off [Gentiles!] and peace to those who were near [Jews!]; for through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father.” | Ephesians 2:13-18*

We are ready to set forth, preaching that same peace to the world and I believe this is why it is styled as ‘shoes’ or ‘to be shod’ with the gospel of peace. Our first move of ‘forward motion’ after becoming Christians is framed by the gospel of peace and [reconciliation that we have received](#). We stand in and on this truth. This is the peace that Jesus spoke of

leaving his disciples with, where, as it's recorded in John's gospel, he says, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (John 14:27) It is the supreme and unwavering peace of knowing that we are **friends with God**.

The Sword Of Division

So what exactly did Jesus mean when he said he didn't come to bring peace but a sword? Well, I think this is an acknowledgement that our human life is indelibly tied to the spiritual war that was set in motion in the beginning.

God made humans in His image, to be in close, harmonious relationship with Him, as His family, and to be His perfect image-bearers on this earth. But the first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned and in doing so, caused damage and disruption to the relationship between God and humanity. They were no longer able to be God's perfect image-bearers, as He had purposed for them, and were consequently subject to mortality, becoming slaves to sin. Since then, humans have been engaged in a lifelong battle against the 'ruler of the dominion of darkness – sin'. We and every other human have been fighting the enemy within ourselves and others – sin – since that time (Romans 5-7).

This uncomfortable truth – that sin rules in this world and that we must reject sin if we are to follow Jesus – will bring disturbance in our natural relationships. The gospel of peace asks those who receive it to choose to behave in counter-cultural ways and this will often set believers against the 'powers that be'. Believers have been transferred out of this dominion of sin and darkness and now serve, with thankfulness, King Jesus. The Word of God, incarnated in [the perfect king](#) and image-bearer, Jesus – is *"sharper than any sword, piercing even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow."* It discerns the thoughts and intentions at the deepest level of

each one of us, seeking to transform and renew our hearts if we allow it (Colossians 1: 13: Hebrew 4:2, Romans 12:2).

Sometimes, despite our best efforts to be peacemakers, the attainment of peace in our families or wider relationships is not attained. This is the sword that Jesus spoke of, the division that would come between those who choose to follow King Jesus and those who persist in serving the ruler of this world. Yet it's important to remember in all of this that it is a *spiritual battle*. We are not at war with people but with sin.

"We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world." | Ephesians 6:12 (CEV)

How Do We Make Peace?

We must behave in the same way as God, who was so concerned for peace that He sent His Son *"to guide our feet into the path of peace"* (Luke 1:79, Isaiah 2:4). If our Father is a peacemaker, then we will be too!

"First, pray for those who you may be at odds with or who persecute you (Matthew 5:44). Pray by acknowledging God's sovereign rule and pray that your enemy might acknowledge that too.

Then, in Matthew 5:47, Jesus gives the other specific example of peacemaking – love – in this text: "If you salute [greet] only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?" In other words, if there is a rupture in one of your relationships, or if there is someone who opposes you, don't nurse that grudge. Don't feed the animosity by ignoring and avoiding that person. That is the natural thing to do – just cross the street so that you don't have to greet them. But that is not the impulse of [the Spirit](#) of a peacemaking God, who sacrificed His Son to reconcile us to Himself and to each

other.

Peacemaking tries to build bridges to people – it does not want the animosity to remain. It wants reconciliation. It wants harmony. And so it tries to show what may be the only courtesy the enemy will tolerate, namely, a greeting. The peacemaker looks the enemy right in the eye and says, “Good morning, John.” And he says it with a longing for peace in his heart, not with a phony gloss of politeness to cover his anger.” – [Desiring God](#)

A peacemaker – a child of the gospel – is someone who longs for peace and works for peace but who also acknowledges that some barriers may simply not be able to be overcome. [Allegiance to the king](#) is always of primary importance. Jesus’ blessing pronounced upon those who would be ‘persecuted for the sake of righteousness’ demonstrates that the goal of peace is clearly subordinated to the goal of righteousness. James later supports this in his letter to believers, where he says, “*The wisdom from above is **first pure, then peaceable.***” (James 3:17)

Finally, in conclusion, I believe it’s an important detail that being ‘*shod with the gospel of peace*’ is listed directly after putting on ‘*the breastplate of righteousness*’, the piece of armour which protects the vital organs, particularly the heart. Before we set out anywhere to ‘negotiate reconciliation’ (either personal or as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace), we need to examine our hearts, testing our motives and ensuring our heart is safely guarded against personal deception or impure motives.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” | Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

The Christian life isn't always easy and the next step isn't always clear. Sometimes we need courage to take that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.

Discipleship: Developing Your Authentic Self

When considering the ideas and thoughts surrounding [Church burnout](#), it became apparent that there is another serious issue facing many Christians today – in both their personal and church lives. The issue is a lack of spiritual and emotional maturity, leading to the cultivation of a 'false self' and a layering over our true self.

"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." | 1 Corinthians 13:11, NIV

Layering Over Our True Self

When we accept the saving work of Jesus in our lives and commit to a life lived in him, we become a new creature. It is a metaphorical rebirth to 'newness of life'. We are, as Corinthians explains, like little children, with all the wide-eyed wonder of this new life stretching out before us. This faith and dependence on God to undertake great things for us is commended by Jesus and he goes so far as to say that *"...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 18:2-4, NIV). This childlike faith is essential to beginning a relationship with God, through Jesus, and this kind of faith needs to remain a constant in our lives.

And yet, many Christians never develop further than this moment. They remain as children, spiritually immature and never attaining to the radical transition of living faithfully to their true selves in Christ. Instead of genuine spiritual growth, beginning from their core and being demonstrated exponentially in their lives, Christians layer over their potential true self with a false reality of who they are.

They are concerned about who other people think they are rather than being concerned about **who God thinks they are**. They are emotionally disconnected from the reality of what life with Jesus really looks like, in real and practical terms. Christian life becomes theory rather than practice. This process of layering – creating and developing a false self over the top of core emotional truths – ensures that we remain entrapped and enslaved to ‘the old man’, rather than liberated in Jesus as a new creation.

The Deception Of The False Self

The deeply entrenched false self is actually a refusal to accept God’s grace and its transforming effect on our life. Instead of being defined by what **God has done for us**, we become defined by who we perceive we are. We tell ourselves, ***I am what I do; I am what I have; I am what others think I am***. We are driven by performance, possessions or popularity, rather than by who we are to God.

The broader culture around us certainly substantiates this point of view and it can be very difficult to dismantle the false self and allow our true self in Christ to emerge. Yet, this is our life’s work and is the essence of what discipleship really means. To think otherwise is to be deceived.

Following God Into The Unknown

Getting to your core requires following God into the unknown –

to being committed to emotional and spiritual reality, not denial or illusion. It means developing a relationship with Him and becoming who God has called you to be. Initially, it requires that childlike faith, but on that faith must be built conviction, through the process of discipleship.

Jesus' life was dominated by his conviction that he was sent to do his Father's will. This conviction produced a deep awareness of his life's purpose and he remained deeply connected and authentic to his true self. When people develop Christlike convictions, they too will develop a sense of purpose in life.

At times, our false self has become such a part of who we are that we don't even realise it. However, the consequences – fear, self-protection, possessiveness, manipulation, self-destructive tendencies, self-promotion, self-indulgence, and a need to distinguish ourselves from others – are harder to hide.

Discipleship: Developing Your Authentic Self

To be a disciple, in the biblical sense, is to be actively imitating both the life and teaching of the master. It isn't the same as being a student, by today's modern understanding, but is rather a deliberate apprenticeship which makes the fully formed disciple **a living copy of the master**.

This process of discipleship is a principle-centered, character-based “inside out” approach to developing our authentic self in Christ. It means to start first with ourselves; even more fundamentally, to start with the most **inside** part of self – our core – and to honestly analyse our paradigms, our character and our motives.

“The inside-out approach says that private victories precede public victories, that making and keeping promises to

ourselves precedes making and keeping promises to others. It says that it is futile to put personality ahead of character, to try and improve relationships with others before improving ourselves" | Stephen Covey

It is a process that moves us from being a spiritually and emotionally immature child to being a fully mature and developed adult – *"a person dedicated to God, and capable and equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:17, NET).

Discipleship Comes From Differentiation

A helpful way to clarify this process of growing in our faithfulness to our true selves is by using the term 'differentiation'. Differentiation is a person's capacity to "define his or her own life's goals and values apart from the pressures of those around them." The key emphasis of differentiation is on the ability to think clearly and carefully as another means, besides our feelings, of knowing ourselves.

People with a high level of differentiation have their own beliefs, convictions, directions, goals and values apart from the pressures around them. They can choose, before God, how they want to be without being controlled by the approval or disapproval of others.

People with a low level of differentiation are those with little sense of their unique God-given life. They need continual affirmation and validation from others because **they don't have a clear sense of who they are**. They depend on what other people think and feel in order to have a sense of their own worth and identity.

Church Life Shouldn't Come At The Expense

Of A Personal Relationship With God

A healthy church life provides many benefits. We find peace and fulfillment in Jesus. Our lives become enriched, our burdens are eased, and we develop supportive relationships to help us in hard times. Service within our church becomes something that fills us with joy and deep personal fulfillment.

However, we need to remember that the most important relationship in our life is the one between God and ourselves. He is the one who sees clearly to [the heart of us](#). He can distinguish between our authentic self and the cultivated 'false self' that others may see. And He, alone, judges the thoughts and intentions of our hearts.

Our church life should therefore become an extension of our relationship with God. As church or Christian communities, we need to ensure we develop strategies and skills to grow in our discipleship and to move towards being emotionally and spiritually mature. This includes biblical ways to integrate emotions like anger, sadness or fear and being able to deal with these in authentic ways.

Four Ways To Develop Your Authentic Self

1. Pay attention to your interior (the "heart of you") in silence and solitude.
2. Find trusted companions to help you along the way.
3. Move out of your comfort zone.
4. Pray for courage.

As Christian people, one of the greatest gifts we can give our world is to be a community of emotionally healthy adults who love well. This will take the power of God and a commitment to learn, grow and break with unhealthy, destructive patterns that may go back generations in our families and cultures – and in some cases, our Christian [culture](#) also.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you should love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among one another.” | John 13:34-35, BLB

I owe a great deal of thanks to the following authors; Peter Scazzero, Rick Warren and Stephen Covey, for their insight, wisdom and valuable words regarding this subject. I have quoted extensively from their works. In particular, I would highly recommend the book “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” by Peter Scazzero as an excellent starting point for anyone genuinely interested in investing in a deep, beneath-the-surface spiritual formation paradigm.

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Keep Your Eyes On Jesus

We're [called to a radical life](#).

This is a life in which we're called to follow someone we've never seen. We've heard about him but we've never seen him with our own eyes. We've 'believed the report', the good message about who Jesus is and why he came, and our hearts have been convicted to follow him. And even though we haven't seen him, we love him.

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” | 1 Peter 1:8, ESV

The Redemptive Power Of His Sacrifice

We have come to realise that, without Jesus, we are nothing more than 'dead men walking'.

We're reminded of the story of the serpent placed on the pole during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Numbers 21). Their criticism of God and His way brought a plague of poisonous snakes throughout the camp. Moses was told to place a copper snake on a pole for all to see and anyone who fixed their gaze on that serpent on the pole would be healed and live.

A snake on a pole has come to represent medicinal healing throughout the medical world today and we can, of course, see the redemptive symbol in this story for our Christian lives. The bronze serpent is the clearest type of the saving work of Jesus. Jesus himself used this symbol to appeal to the people in his day (John 3:14). Like the serpent, Jesus was to be raised on a stake for all to see, and all those who looked to his redemptive sacrifice would live.

We fix our gaze on Jesus, crucified, believing in the power contained in his name, and though we are dying, yet we live! Death no longer has the final say.

*"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."
| 1 Corinthians 15:-20-23, NIV*

Believing And Becoming In Jesus

Our Christian life starts the moment we turn our eyes to Jesus and [acknowledge him](#) as Lord of our heart and our life. But our gaze must never leave him.

The Christian life is one of transformation; of more than just believing, but of becoming, where the impossible is possible. We are able to become more than conquerors through him who loved us.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” | Romans 8:31-32, 37, ESV

We are learning to follow where Jesus has gone already and we are learning, day by day, to trust him as our good shepherd.

A Leap Of Faith

Living the Christian life is often stepping out into the unknown. It's often an exercise in surrender, trust, and faith.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” | Hebrews 11:1-3, ESV

We look around us and see how things presently are, in this life, **and yet we believe that there is more** and that **we can be more**. This belief is underpinned by the [evidence of the risen Christ](#). Resurrection, the most unbelievable, incredible event to have possibly happened **has** happened. When Christians gather together for communion, we celebrate and witness to this remarkable event. The ramification for us as believers is not a small thing: the [same power](#) that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us!

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.” | Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT

“And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.” | Romans 8:11, BSB

Jesus promised his followers that he would be with them, even to the end of the world. This is his promise to us. Sometimes he will lead us through fire and across water, through deep valleys and up high mountains. There is no promise that the Christian life will always be easy but he promises he will never leave us or forsake us.

Some of you may be feeling the heat of those flames. Or perhaps you feel like your feet are sinking and you’re going to drown. Raise your eyes and fix them on Jesus! He goes before us, he stands beside us, every day of this Christian life.

Faith Is Learning From History

We learn a lot from the story of Israel and their exodus from Egypt. When the children of Israel were delivered out of slavery, that moment only signaled the beginning of a journey of faith. And almost immediately, they were brought to the edge of the ocean, with churning water ahead of them and the enemy hard at their heels. There was no way forward and no way back. And then, suddenly, a miracle was performed and God parted the ocean before them – a way out – seemingly impossible but clearly visible. They had to make a decision of faith – to step into that path cut through the ocean and cross through to the other side. Moses, their leader, spoke boldly

at this moment:

“Don’t be afraid, stand firm and watch God do His work for you.”

Some of us may be in that moment right now, afraid of what is behind us and unable to see a path ahead of us. Sometimes, the step of faith involves standing still and watching God go to work for us. Sometimes, faith asks us to step out into the unknown.

We have the story in Matthew 14:24-31 of Peter being called by Jesus to step out of the boat and onto the churning water. And we realise from reading this story that sometimes faith asks us to step out of the boat, out of the place where it feels comfortable and relatively safe and into the dark and churning ocean. In those moments, too, we must not lower our gaze. Faith will keep us afloat, fear will sink us.

We must look for Jesus and keep looking for Jesus. He is the good shepherd, who laid his life down for the sheep, and, like the Psalmist, we can confidently say,

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” | Psalm 23:4

Keeping Our Eyes On Jesus

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus? How do we ‘follow him’ and keep him front and foremost in our minds, day by day?

We need to make him real! We need to learn about him, discover what kind of leader he is, read about his character, his personality, his emotions. We need to talk to him, tell him our struggles and our fears. We need to ask for his courage to be ours. We need to invest in **relationship** with him; deep and personal and transformational.

We need to be reminded and convicted in our hearts that he is not just our personal saviour and friend, but [the resurrected King](#), in whom all power rests and with whom all things are possible!

When we come together as church, we are reminded that the church was born from the sacrifice of a man who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. Who, for the joy that was before him, endured the cross. And whose resurrection assures us that the best is still yet to come.

“The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest. It’s the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God – “Jesus is my Master” -embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what He did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not “doing” anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting Him to do it for you. That’s salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: “God has set everything right between Him and me!” Scripture reassures us, “No one who trusts God like this – heart and soul – will ever regret it.” | Romans 10-10-13, MSG

The Christian life isn’t always easy and the next step isn’t always clear. Sometimes we need courage to make that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.

Emotionally Spirituality

Healthy

“It’s impossible to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.” | Peter Scazzero, Emotional Healthy Spirituality

Emotions Make Us Human

Do you have emotionally healthy spirituality? Are you emotionally mature? Or are you, perhaps, deeply uncomfortable being intimate with your emotions? Did you realise that emotional maturity and spiritual health are intrinsically linked? Our emotions are at the core of what it is to be human and the journey of genuine transformation to emotionally healthy spirituality begins with a commitment to allow yourself to feel.

Are You Emotionally Mature?

Are you as emotionally mature as you’d like to think you are? Ask yourself the following questions and you may be surprised and somewhat perturbed with the answers:

- You find it difficult or impossible to be transparent about your life struggles or how you *really* are. If someone asks, you reply “I’m fine”, “all good”, or “great week – yours?”.
- You take any suggestion as a personal attack or rejection, rather than seeing it as an opportunity to improve or grow.
- You are intolerant of different views to your own and often tend to speak in very black and white terms about differences ie “right” or “wrong”.
- You may be outwardly helpful, friendly, or giving to

others but in private, you're actually a lousy spouse, parent, or family member.

- Others may describe you as unteachable, proud, insecure, or defensive.
- You may deal with conflict or turmoil with others by using methods that emotionally distance you from the very person you need resolution with. You often choose to talk with someone other than the person you are in conflict with. You avoid face-to-face conversations or simply pretend a situation doesn't exist.

You might be feeling somewhat dismayed to find yourself in one or more of the above scenarios. The good news is you're definitely not alone. Many (or most of us, if we're honest) find ourselves somewhere in the middle of thinking we're emotionally mature and discovering that, in reality, we're not. But what does our emotional maturity have to do with our spirituality?

Humanity – Made In The Image And Likeness Of God

Humans are incredibly complex creatures. yet we can divide all these complexities into five general parts or components that, put together, make us a "whole" or "complete" human:

Intellectual – Humans are created superior to animals; we're able to reason and make decisions for our own lives. The pursuit of knowledge is inbuilt in humans and the acquisition of knowledge is considered to be highly valuable and profitable.

Spiritual – Humans are also able to comprehend and make decisions based on more than just logical conclusions, knowledge or experience. We have the ability, if we choose, to base our reasoning on spiritual values with moral considerations. We're able to comprehend "higher ideals". [Vines Expository Bible Dictionary](#) defines "spirituality" as

“things that have their origin with God and therefore are in harmony with His character”. The ability to comprehend spiritual things makes us uniquely different to animals.

Physical – Humans aren't insubstantial, rather, our very essence, our consciousness, the thing that makes us, US, is contained within a literal, physical body. We *feel* things physically; touch, cold, heat, hunger, thirst, tiredness, and our physical state can be nurtured or abused (by ourselves or others). Our bodies are incredibly designed and are, as [the Psalmist](#) so aptly described them, “fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

Social – Humans have a natural desire to belong, to be loved, to be “part of something”. We're generally extremely social creatures. We tend to develop our circle or tribe and cultivate that to our benefit because we enjoy company and friendship. We hate loneliness or the feeling of being unwanted or not needed. Social rejection or disconnection is actually one of the major causes of depression in humans.

Emotional – Finally, humans are emotional and our emotions are actually connected to all the other parts of us. Our emotions are the very core, the heart, of what it is to be human. We *feel* elation when we *learn* something new (intellectual). We *feel* pain when our bodies experience *hurt* (physical) and we *feel* acceptance and love when we *belong* (social). It should make sense to us that our spirituality and our emotions are deeply connected. But, somehow, we struggle to recognise this connection and, in fact, we often actively seek to disconnect the two. Yet, our spirituality and our emotions are inseparable.

“The call of emotionally healthy spirituality is a call to a radical, countercultural life. It is a call to intentionality, rhythm, and expectation of a life transformed by the risen Christ, with the power to see through the illusions and pretense of our world.” | Peter Scazzero

Emotions are data and this data gives us important

information, enabling us to make values-based decisions. The problem with ignoring the connection between our emotions and our spirituality is that we then ignore important information about ourselves, how and why we're feeling certain things, and the need to deal with those feelings.

Without acknowledging our emotions and using that information, our values-based decisions, those "*higher ideals*" or "*things that have their origin in God*", can't be acted upon in a deeply connected and meaningful way.

We become one-dimensional creatures, stagnant and immovable, rather than multi-faceted and growing towards being "*thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:17), and we certainly don't have an emotionally healthy spirituality.

"There is no greater disaster in spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality. In fact, the true spiritual life is not an escape from reality but an absolute commitment to it."

| Peter Scazzerro

The Iceberg – What's Really Going On Beneath The Surface

Unresolved or ignored emotions don't just go away. They grow, unchecked, beneath the surface of our life. What people see really is only "the tip of the iceberg." Above the waterline, we may appear to be doing fine, we will often say we *are* fine, but beneath the surface rage, all the unacknowledged and unresolved emotional feelings that we pretend don't exist. We're not being true to ourselves or others and we're not living authentic, meaningful lives. Here's what happens when we ignore our emotions:

- We become fearful
- We become intolerant
- We become critical

- We become ignorant
- We become disconnected
- We become discontented
- We become disillusioned

Still Not Sure About Being Emotionally Connected? Jesus Was Emotional!

We're told that Jesus was like us, in all aspects of his humanity (Hebrews 4:15). He felt every human need and experienced the broad spectrum of human emotion. However, his emotions were always deeply connected to his spirituality. He felt sadness (Luke 19:41), joy (Luke 10:21), anger and distress (Mark 3:5), sorrow (Matthew 26:37), compassion (Luke 7:13), astonishment (Luke 7:9), stress and anxiety (Luke 12:50), and desperation and emotional vulnerability (Mark 14:32-36).

The challenge to shed our "old false" self in order to live authentically in our "new true" self strikes at the very core of true spirituality. Paul the Apostle, expressed this as, "to put off your old self...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22, 24)." | Peter Scazzero

Emotional courage is listening to what your heart is telling you, ensuring you are emotionally connected with your spirituality and therefore able to make important, values-based decisions. Knowing yourself completely is critical to knowing God. Ignoring your emotions is ignoring the very way in which you draw closer to and become more like God.

Sometime, discomfort may be the price of admission to a meaningful life. Emotionally healthy spirituality is about reality, not denial or illusion and it's an essential part of being human.

Further Recommended Resources: [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Peter Scazzero. The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage, Susan David, TEDWomen2017](#)

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